



# San Diego City Attorney **CASEY GWINN**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **BOAT BURNING PROVES COSTLY TO SAN DIEGO MAN**

#### *Illegal Disposal of Boat Results In Environmental Prosecution*

(San Diego, CA, May 5, 2000) — A San Diego man must pay close to \$3,000 in clean-up costs after he unlawfully tried to dispose of an old sailboat by burning it in two firepits on a San Diego beach. James Thomas pled no contest in San Diego Superior Court today to using a firepit for a non-recreational purpose. Thomas was ordered by the court to reimburse the San Diego Unified Port District \$2,974 for clean-up costs associated with the boat's unlawful disposal. Thomas must also pay a \$100 fine, complete forty hours of community service with "I Love A Clean San Diego," and serve a three-year term of probation.

Thomas disposed of the 35-year-old fiberglass boat last summer by chopping it into small pieces and burning them in firepits on Shelter Island. The burning fiberglass, plastic, and wood, covered with marine paint, created a noxious smoke cloud, which caught the attention of two San Diego Harbor Police officers. Even though almost overcome by the fumes, the officers investigated and discovered Thomas near the firepits. Thomas admitted to burning the boat to save the cost of proper disposal.

The San Diego Fire Department put out the fires. The San Diego Unified Port District was then required to bring in an environmental specialist to test the ash from the fires and to clean up the overflowing firepits. Laboratory tests revealed the ash contained certain metals from the marine paint and was hazardous.

"The cost to properly dispose of the 7,000 pound boat would have been between \$200-\$400," Deputy City Attorney Kathryn Lange, the prosecutor in the case, explained. "The defendant's attempt to save money placed the public in danger and will now cost him substantially more than it would have if he had properly disposed of the boat. Firepits are only for recreational use, not for burning demolition debris."

Boats may be donated to the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Southwestern Yacht Club Jr. Foundation, St. Vincent de Paul, Volunteers of America, or other organizations. The Miramar Landfill will also accept boats for disposal for a fee. The San Diego Unified Port District provides information on how to properly dispose of boats and can be reached at (619) 686-6200.

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